A DAY IN POMPEII

This commemorative booklet is a companion to the exhibition *A Day in Pompeii*, presented at Museum of Science, Boston, MA; Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, OH; and Denver Museum of Nature & Science, Denver, CO.

This exhibition is a collaboration with the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei (SANP), an agency within the Italian Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali responsible for safeguarding and enhancing the cultural heritage of Pompeii and other locations in the Vesuvian area. It operates four archaeological sites (Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and Oplontis) and a museum at Boscoreale, all open to the public.

SANP staff selected and prepared the artifacts for display in the exhibition. The U.S. partners thank the SANP for the loan of the exhibit artifacts, and the exhibit coordinator Anna Civale for her diligence and support.

The Gulf Coast Exploreum developed and designed this commemorative booklet with input from the Science Museum of Minnesota, the San Diego Natural History Museum, and Discovery Place.

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LOST . . . . . PRESERVED . . . . . RECOVERED.

Pompeii is one of the most famous and tragic cities of antiquity. On August 24, A.D. 79, Pompeii and the surrounding area vanished under a thick layer of volcanic ash when nearby Mount Vesuvius suddenly erupted. For the next 17 centuries, the city remained lost, forgotten and amazingly preserved as if sealed in a time capsule.

Rediscovered in the early 1700s, Pompeii has slowly revealed itself again, street by street, building by building, room by room. No other ancient city has been found so complete and intact, free from centuries of change and modernization. The recovered architecture, art and personal belongings provide an unparalleled record of what life was like in the Roman Empire.

Few other ancient sites have yielded such stark images of individual inhabitants, both humble and affluent, caught in their last moments of life. Pompeii's haunting body casts immortalize those who failed to escape and evoke the human drama of the city's tragic end.

The exhibition tells the story of several aspects of daily life in the town as it was before time stopped. Highlighted are the customs and activities associated with food and dining, commerce and business, medicine, religious beliefs, burial practices, private residences and gardens, and luxury and beauty.

The exhibit next recounts the final hours of life in the city, presents the poignant plaster body casts of victims of the tragedy, and ends with the story of the site's recovery over the past 250 years.

Map of Pompeii and surrounding region

N
THE CAMPANIA REGION
The cataclysmic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius affected the entire region of Campania, including the nearby towns of Herculaneum, Oplontis, Boscoreale and others. Artifacts from these surrounding sites are included in the exhibition.
0
1
2
3
4 miles
MT. VESUVIUS
NAPLES
HERCULANEUM
BOSCOREALE
MISENEUM
POMPEII
OPLONTIS
SARNO RIVER
GULF OF CUMAE
(BAY OF NAPLES)
STABIAE
ROME
POMPEII

WELCOME TO POMPEII

By the first century A.D., Pompeii was a middle-class provincial Roman town and a prosperous commercial center. About 20,000 people from all social classes and their slaves lived in Pompeii.

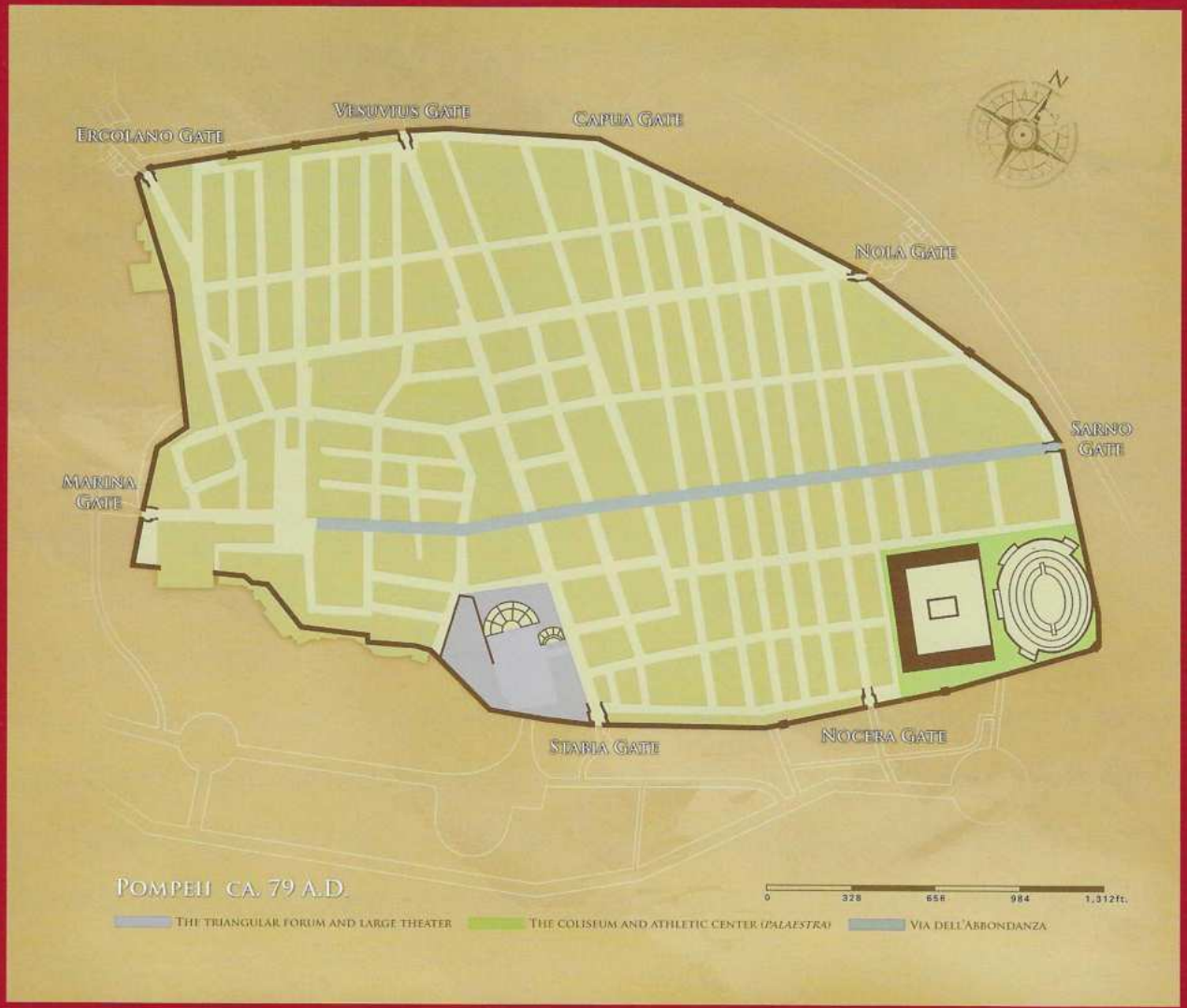
Pompeii's geographic location contributed in large measure to its robust economy. The region's mild climate and fertile volcanic soils supported a productive agricultural industry. The nearby Bay of Naples was rich with sea life, and Pompeii became an important regional center for processing and selling fish and other seafood. The city's stores, markets and workshops thrived.

Because of its position on the Sarno River and easy access to the sea, Pompeii was also a bustling port. Through its harbor, local goods were shipped to and exotic products imported from Imperial Rome's far-flung provinces.

As the agricultural, fishing and shipping industries flourished, many smaller businesses were established to service the growing population as well as travelers passing through the city.

The town's dynamic economy brought widespread affluence. Wealthy merchants and entrepreneurs built Pompeii's fortune along with their own. Public buildings and private residences were richly embellished and filled with sculpture, fountains and beautiful personal possessions.

Most residents enjoyed theatrical and sporting events, frequented thermal baths, and participated in the vibrant political life of the city. For many, life in Pompeii was comfortable and pleasant.


N
Ercolano Gate
Vesuvius Gate
Capua Gate
Nola Gate
Sarno Gate
Marina Gate
Stabia Gate
Nocera Gate
Pompeii ca. 79 A.D.
0
328
656
984
1,312ft.
The triangular forum and large theater
The coliseum and athletic center (palaestra)
Via dell'Abbondanza

THE ERUPTION OF VESUVIUS

This chronology of events is based on the historic written accounts of Pliny the Younger and modern findings of archeologists and volcanologists.

79 AUGUST 24

1:00 P.M.
Mt. Vesuvius erupts suddenly and with force. A cloud of volcanic materials quickly rises high above the mountain and spreads out in the shape of a mushroom. A thin layer of ash begins to cover the area. Within 30 minutes, the swirling dark cloud rises about 9 miles above the mountain.

FEBRUARY 5,
62 A.D.
Major earthquake hits Pompeii and region.

64
A second earthquake damages many buildings in the city. No one connects these events with the nearby mountain.

6:00 A.M. 8:00 A.M. 12:00 P.M. 3:00 P.M.

MORNING
A series of small emissions from Mt. Vesuvius is seen.

BY 3:00 P.M.
Vesuvius continues to release volcanic materials made up of white pumice and, to a lesser degree, stones, lapilli and ash. In Pompeii this debris begins to accumulate rapidly. Most residents are fleeing the area although some decide to seek shelter in buildings and beneath porches. The debris begins to clog the Sarno River and the port, rendering both impassable to ships. Seismic shocks shake the area.

AUGUST 25

6:00 P.M. | 8:00 P.M. | 12:00 A.M. | 5:00 A.M. | 8:00 A.M.

5:00 - 6:00 P.M.

Pieces of pumice as large as 15 to 20 inches in diameter are falling. The roofs of the city begin to collapse under the weight of deposited debris. Roads are clogged with volcanic material, making flight more difficult. The dense eruptive cloud, now rising about 16 miles above the mountain, obliterates the sun. Darkness, punctuated by flashes of lightning, adds to the obstacles facing the fleeing inhabitants.

BY 8:00 P.M.

Almost 5 feet of volcanic material cover Pompeii and surrounding areas. The eruption changes as the size and density of emitted materials increases. The eruptive column, now denser than the surrounding air, partially collapses and the first flows of pyroclastic materials start down the mountain's slopes.

1:00 - 2:00 A.M.

Scalding flows of volcanic debris mixed with steam spill out from the volcano and move down the slopes to ground level. They hit areas to the north, south and west of the mountain, including the towns of Herculaneum, Oplontis and Boscoreale, but not Pompeii. All life in the path of the surges is quickly extinguished.

The eruptive column has risen to an amazing height of 20 miles. At Pompeii debris has risen to over 9 feet and reaches the upper stories of buildings. It enters through windows and doors, trapping and suffocating to death some of those hiding within. Others are killed by collapsing roofs and walls.

AROUND 5:00 A.M.

Strong earthquakes continue to strike the area. The rain of pumice and ash abates, but darkness prevails as the rising sun is still hidden by the massive ash cloud. Many seize the apparent opportunity to flee their hiding places and escape the city. Walking over the pumice deposits is difficult, as is breathing in the ash-filled air.

6:30 A.M.

The first pyroclastic surge reaches Pompeii from the north but is held back by the city's wall.

8:00 A.M.

The most destructive of the surges hits Pompeii. Wherever it goes, fire and lightning precede. The tallest town structures succumb. This same surge continues its destructive path throughout the region arriving at Stabiae, and reaching as far as Naples.

Volcanic activity continues for several days, but on a much smaller scale. By the time the eruption comes to an end, Pompeii is buried, with only the tops of the highest walls still visible. The terrible eruption annihilates the summit and reduces Mt.Vesuvius' height by almost half.

BY 7:30 A.M.

A new series of pyroclastic surges make it over the walls and bury Pompeii. They come so suddenly and unexpectedly that they engulf and suffocate not only the people still hiding in buildings, but also others in the streets attempting to escape. Many are also trapped at the port, which is overwhelmed only minutes after the city is buried. The majority who died in Pompeii, died in this phase of the eruption.

FOOD AND DINING

Pompeii's residents enjoyed three meals a day. Breakfast *(jentaculum)* and lunch *(prandium)* consisted of bread, cheese and sometimes leftovers from the previous day. These two meals were often eaten on the run, either at home or at outdoor food bars, or *thermopolia*, that lined the streets. The *thermopolia*, of which there were hundreds in Pompeii, were the first-century version of today's fast-food outlets.

The evening meal *(cena)* was served in the *triclinium*, the dining room of the home. This was the main meal of the day and consisted of at least three courses: an appetizer of eggs or oysters, the principal course of fish, roasted meats and vegetables, and a dessert of dried or fresh fruits topped with honey, or maybe baked custard.

Wine, often watered down, was the preferred beverage at all meals.

Garum, a sauce made with the viscera and flesh of fish, was an essential condiment with Roman cuisine. It added a sharp, salty taste to otherwise bland dishes. The *garum* produced at Pompeii was of the highest quality, much sought after and exported throughout the Roman world.

Carbonized bread
Plaster reproduction
Pompeii
Centuries-old blackened loaves such as this one were found in the ruins of many ovens, abandoned by bakers scurrying to escape the sudden volcanic eruption. From these carbonized samples we have learned that a typical loaf was round and flat, scored into eight to ten wedges, and was stamped with the baker's name.

Even when fresh, Pompeian bread was quite hard because of the quality of the flour. It was usually eaten dipped in wine, oil or soup.

Pots and serving dishes
Various materials: bronze, ceramic
Pompeii
These are examples of cooking pots and serving dishes found in Pompeii's kitchens.

COMMERCE AND BUSINESS

A pile of gold coins
Gold
Oplontis
These gold coins were part of a collection discovered in Villa B in the town of Oplontis. The owner may have fled during the eruption but probably expected to recover his money once life returned to normal.

The gold aureus was one of the standard denominations of the Roman monetary system, which Emperor Augustus did much to establish during his reign (27 B.C. to A.D. 14). An aureus was worth about 25 silver denarii and was the highest-valued denomination minted at the time.

Owning a business in Pompeii was a respectable and often lucrative profession.

Many hardworking freedmen and freedwomen *(liberti* and *libertae)* became wealthy enough to rise above their humble origins to build opulent villas, filled with fine art. Slaves, who were often paid to oversee their master's business, sometimes earned enough to purchase their own freedom.

Many of Pompeii's most successful entrepreneurs owed their wealth to the largesse of the local area. Year-round, merchants and vendors sold and processed the constant supply of lush fruits, vegetables, grain, meat, fowl and seafood brought into the city from area farms or off fishing boats from the Bay of Naples. Workshops pressed local grapes into wine, and the region's olive groves produced oil that was in high demand throughout the Empire.

The fish sauce *garum* was produced in bulk near the harbor. Fine wool from the region gave rise to a wholesale wool trade.

Other merchants specialized in the export of these local goods through Pompeii's harbor to the far reaches of the Roman Empire. In exchange, they imported lamps from northern Italy, pottery from Gaul, and oil and wines from Spain, Sicily and Crete.

Pompeii's potteries were kept busy making the many shipping containers, or amphorae, needed by the import-export trade. Volcanic elements in the regional soil gave the local clay a distinctive red color. The resulting Pompeian Red Ware has been found in Greece, North Africa, Germany and Britain.

Many smaller businesses, often family operated, were established to service the growing local population and travelers passing through Pompeii. These included bakeries, fullers or laundries, restaurants, hotels and baths. Workshops produced pottery, metal, glass and leather wares, and craftsmen created jewelry, marble and bronze statues, and other luxury goods for everyday use.

Pompeii's streets and forum were busy places where hard work often paid off with great reward.

Small portable scales
Bronze
Pompeii
This small scale was probably designed to be portable. Goods would be placed in a pan on one side and the counterweight hung on the other. Even with utilitarian objects, care was taken to add artistic elements. On this scale the counterweight is a portrait of a deity, possibly the god of good fortune, or perhaps a member of the imperial family.

Four amphorae lined in a row
Ceramic
Pompeii
These four shipping containers, or amphorae, are typical Pompeian Red Ware. The interior of each was coated with pitch to seal the otherwise porous pottery. A cork stopper would have closed the top opening.

Pompeii revealed much about the medical practices of the Romans.

Medicine was perceived to be part magic and part science. People believed in potions and talismans as well as more practical medical treatments. Doctors were considered craftsmen, like potters or sculptors.

Complete sets of medical instruments, including scalpels and probes similar to those used by surgeons today, were discovered. These show how knowledgeable some medical practitioners were and how advanced Roman medicine was.

Pompeii's doctors set bones, drilled holes in skulls, sutured wounds, performed amputations, and used prostheses to replace lost limbs. They performed minor plastic surgery such as the removal of moles, understood that arteries carried blood, and cleaned their instruments in boiling water after use.

A set of medical instruments
Bronze
Pompeii
Five surgical instruments with a bronze ring holder: a drill with an olive-shaped top; an auricular drill, broken at one end and slightly enlarged at the center; two square-bodied needles; and a fragment of the point of a needle.

BURIAL PRACTICES

Pompeii's cemeteries were located outside the city walls, as Roman law forbade burial within the city. They were bustling public places arranged beside important roads leading to and from the city, which ensured that the deceased would be remembered by many for a long time.

The women of the household prepared the body for burial. They placed coins on the eyes or in the mouth so that the deceased would have money to pay the ferryman Charon, who transported the dead to the Underworld. Wealthy individuals were laid out in their homes to allow friends and colleagues to come by and say their final farewells.

By the first century A.D., the Romans were cremating their dead. Ashes of the deceased were collected in earthenware, glass or, more rarely, marble vases. These were placed inside the larger tombs or into niches on the walls of funerary chambers. Some were simply buried underground with a stone or marble marker used to denote the place.

Favorite and important objects, including combs, coins or toys in the case of children, were placed alongside the urns to accompany the deceased on his or her journey to the afterlife.

Large funereal (over 6 feet tall) statue of a mature woman
Marble
Pompeii, Porta Nocera Cemetery
This larger-than-life statue of a Roman matron is typical of the funerary portraits that adorned Pompeian tombs. The woman is wearing a stola *pulled over her head; her expression and posture represent the pious, modest and perfect woman.*

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The people of Pompeii worshipped numerous gods and goddesses. Religious practices existed on several levels.

State religion focused on public festivals and citywide celebrations and bound the citizens together as a community. Pompeii's ties to Rome were emphasized by the cult of the Capitoline Triad, the three principal deities of Rome: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva.

In Pompeii, particular attention was also given to the patron gods of the city—Jupiter, Apollo and Venus.

In the late first century B.C., Emperor Augustus added an imperial cult centered on him and his family. While he limited worship of his person, he allowed his *genius* (advising spirit) to be honored and his name to be linked with other deities by the addition of the word *Augustus*—for example, *Fortuna Augusta*.

Many of Pompeii's residents also participated in a "mystery cult," so called because followers were initiated during secret rituals. Devotees believed that the chosen deity was a savior figure who promised followers a fulfilling and pleasant afterlife. The cults of Isis, introduced to Pompeii during the second century B.C., and of Bacchus were among the most prominent.

Finally, most households had a small shrine, or *lararium*, devoted to the gods held in special honor by the family. These included the *lares*, thought of as dead ancestors of the family who protected the household.

Household shrines took many forms. Some were wall niches or cupboards, some were wall paintings, and still others resembled small temples. Small statues of the *lares* and other deities were placed in the niches or on tables beneath the paintings.

The lares statues
Bronze
Pompeii
The lares *were worshipped as the protectors of the house and family. They were usually placed in pairs within the household shrine, one on either side of the figures of other family deities.*

Fortuna on her throne
Bronze
Pompeii
Fortuna, goddess of luck, fate and fortune, was a general favorite, particularly with mothers and slaves. She was also an important deity within the imperial or state cult. One of the most prominent shrines in Pompeii was the Temple of Fortuna Augusta.

Statue of Venus
Marble
Pompeii
This is a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture from the fifth century B.C. Venus leans on a cushioned pillar, her left leg crossing her right in a casual, almost sensual pose. Her dress falls off one shoulder, and the sinuous curve of the body recognizes her role as the goddess of love.

Hand of Sabazius
Bronze
Pompeii
This complicated bronze sculpture of a right hand is associated with the cult of Sabazius, a god of vegetation or reproduction, imported from Asia Minor. On the palm of the hand is the image of Sabazius himself, depicted as a man dressed in a short tunic belted at the waist and wearing high shoes.

The hand is open, with two fingers folded down and positioned as if giving a blessing. The smaller statue of the god also has his right hand raised in the sign of a blessing. On the wrist, a woman nurses a baby, a reference to the god's protection of women in labor and of mothers and babies. More symbols, including a serpent, appear on the back of the hand.

PRIVATE RESIDENCES AND GARDENS

The Pompeii residence served as both a private family space and, during the day, a public place for work and business. Its size and the quality of the decorations reflected the power, social rank and wealth of the family.

Furnishings were sparse, in part to better appreciate the pictorial decoration of the rooms.

Beds for sleeping *(lectus cubicularis)* or couches for reclining on during meals *(lectus triclinaris)* ranged from simple stonework platforms to elaborately carved wooden examples with headboards and footboards decorated with ivory or silver. Rocking cradles also existed.

Tables of various sizes and shapes were used to lay out meals for quiet family dinners or banquets. Marble versions often adorned the atrium or garden areas. Seating was offered on simple benches, in wood or bronze, or ornate chairs, with or without backrests and sometimes with folding legs.

Clothing and other personal items were kept in chests, on open shelves or in built-in cupboards.

Before the discovery of Pompeii, information on Roman painting and wall decorations of the time was scarce. Pompeii's many frescoes, preserved in and recovered from the volcanic debris, not only provided examples of art of incredible beauty and bright color, but also shed light on the techniques and styles favored by ancient Romans.

Statue of Bacchus
Bronze
Pompeii
Bacchus was the Roman god of wine and drink, equated with the Greek god Dionysus. His festival was celebrated on March 16 and 17. Not surprisingly, Bacchus was much venerated in Pompeii.

This garden statuette was discovered in 1957 and represents the god as a youth. The large eyes are rendered in ivory and a brown-colored glass paste.

Mosaic tiles generally decorated the floors. Motifs ranged from large, square-shaped *tesserae* of rough workmanship and simple repeated geometric patterns to complex pictorial compositions with colored stones and marbles, glass and gold leaf.

One of the more famous mosaic patterns was found at the entrance to a Pompeian home. It was the image of a ferocious-looking dog and the inscription CAVE CANEM, or BEWARE OF DOG.

The local climate favored life outdoors, and residential gardens, from simple working *horti* to carefully planned spaces, were common. Lunch and dinner were consumed here. Some contained a household *lararium*. Many had a covered path along two or more sides, the peristyle, where one could walk in the shade during the heat of the day.

The abundant supply of water, fed by aqueducts through complex hydraulic systems, gave rise to numerous garden fountains, pools and canals and ensured the survival of many species of flowers, shrubs, fruit and nut trees, evergreens and vines.

Sculptures, frescoes, columns and wall reliefs enriched the spaces.

Herm, long marble column
Marble
Pompeii
This beautifully decorated marble herm was found in the garden of the House of the Vetti. Originally, Greeks placed these pillars, surmounted by a head of the god Hermes, at crossroads or doorways to important places. Hermes was the protector of roads and entrances, and the herms served a magical protective function. Later, the heads of other gods or even famous mortals were added, and people began to use the herms for nonreligious and decorative purposes.

This herm represents, on one side, the sumptuous head of the mature Dionysus, with curls and ringlets framing his solemn face and a long curly mustache and wide beard. He wears the crown of vine leaves. On the other side is the beardless youthful Dionysus, also wearing the characteristic crown of vine leaves and ringlets at his temples and shoulders.

Statue of Aphrodite
Marble
Oplontis, Villa B
This small statue originally stood in the garden of a great villa outside Pompeii. The naked goddess Aphrodite, also called Venus, is shown preparing for a bath. Her pose echoes that of a famous statue of the goddess by the Greek sculptor Praxiteles. Her left foot rests on the wings of a cupid and her left arm on a small statue, perhaps of a priestess or devotee. Pompeii was under the protection of Venus Pompeiiana, and statues and paintings of her were very common.

Garden fresco
Painted plaster
Pompeii, House of the Gold Bracelet
This large fresco, now broken into three sections, covered the entire back wall of the summer triclinium *of the House of the Gold Bracelet. The center section framed a niche, possibly for a working fountain.*

In homes with only a small garden or none at all, these wall paintings served to satisfy the owner's love of greenery by creating the illusion of a large garden, often with lush vegetation, different species of birds and faux trellises.

Oil lamp
Bronze
Pompeii
This oil lamp is soldered to a tall shaft with a tripod base. The curved handle terminates in the head of the oracle god Ammon.

Medallion with couple
Painted plaster
Pompeii, House of the Gold Bracelet
A medallion, in a double frame of green leaves, is painted on the black background of a larger wall. Within, the busts depict a young woman with an older woman behind. All are framed in a square. This composition is typical of the "Fourth Style" of painting on plaster, popular by the first century A.D. Subjects were often complex and largely imaginary. The intent was to add to a room's overall decor.

Stool
Bronze
Pompeii
Typical style found in Pompeii. The size and shape of the seat suggest the stool was used as a footrest for an armchair or triclinium couch.

Fresco, winged female
Painted plaster
Pompeii
These are portions of a panel depicting an imaginary scene that would have been used as a colorful decorative feature in a home. The life-sized winged female figure, adorned with gold jewelry, holds a garland of ivy leaves decorated in the center with a large bow of purple-striped yellow fabric.

LUXURY AND BEAUTY

*Don't be tiresome; don't have your hairstyle done and undone. . . . Leave your hairdresser in peace.**

Bust of a woman
Marble
Oplontis
This bust illustrates one of the simpler hairstyles worn by Pompeian women around A.D. 79. More elaborate styles featured very high and full crowns of curls, and women often added hairpieces to achieve these fashion dictates. Slaves expert in hairdressing were highly valued house servants, but ladies could also frequent hairdresser shops, which were known to exist in Pompeii.

The cultivation of beauty was a constant goal of Pompeian ladies, particularly those of the affluent classes. They used a variety of means to achieve the desired results.

Women, as did all Pompeians, took great care in cleansing their bodies. The number of both public and private baths in the town attests to the importance of bathing. Oils mixed with perfume extracts or with very fine sand were rubbed over the body and then scraped away with special tools *(strigili)*. These were often made of bone or metal and had long handles, ending in a concave blade.

Perfumes were lavished on the body after baths or even during banquets. Oils permeated with perfume were burned in special lamps.

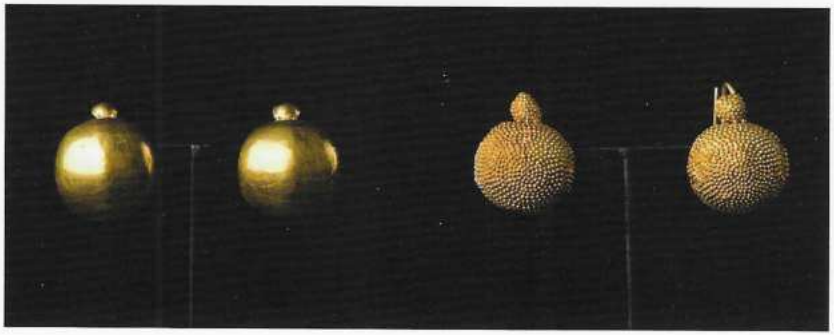
Creams, powders and other cosmetics were applied, and women of high social class had female slaves to take care of these tasks. Mirrors, cosmetics jars, spoons and spatulas for applying makeup and hairpins were essential to the Pompeian woman's daily beauty routine.

Hair was styled in a variety of ways, chosen for what best suited each woman. Usually, hair was parted in the middle and gathered in a bun at the back. A more elaborate coiffure required the services of a slave who was expert in hairdressing *(ornatrix)*. Combs, usually of wood, bone or ivory, and even curling irons *(calamister)* were common hairdressing tools.

Hair was dyed to disguise gray or to simply change the color to something more appealing.

Jewelry was the final touch, enhancing the look but also indicating the wearer's social status. Elegance and artistry of workmanship were particularly valued. Earrings, necklaces, bracelets and rings made of gold and precious stones were common. Rings were very popular and were presented on special occasions such as engagements and weddings.

*Apply your art to reinforce the thin rim of the eyebrows . . . nor is there any shame in highlighting the eyes with fine charcoal. iii. 200-204**



Two pairs of earrings
Gold
Oplontis, Villa B
These are typical of earrings worn by Pompeii's women. The sphere-shaped earrings on the right are decorated with close-embossed dotting, imitating the technique of granulation, a style that was well known in the Vesuvius area.

Two bracelets with rows of gold domes
Gold
Pompeii
This was a popular design, thought to be an original creation of Roman goldsmiths in the first century A.D. A leaf-shaped clasp fastens each bracelet. Although bracelets were sometimes worn by men, they were most commonly seen on the upper arms, wrists and ankles of women.

Necklace
Glass paste
Pompeii
Many necklaces made of simple glass paste were found in Pompeii. Like today's costume jewelry, they gave women an affordable way to enhance their appearance.

*Do not let your armpits reek like a goat . . . do not let your teeth turn black through laziness. . . . Wash out your mouth every morning. iii.193-199.**

*Directives to women from the poet Ovid's *Art of Love*.

THE BODY CASTS

The most poignant finds among the ruins of Pompeii were undoubtedly the body casts of victims of Vesuvius. These were the people who refused to or could not flee during the first phase of the eruption, when dry ash and lapilli rained down upon the city. They took shelter in buildings or under cover to wait out the event. By late evening, however, the volcanic material had reached the upper stories of buildings, and they realized they would have to make a desperate run for it across the deep layers of accumulated ash.

Unfortunately for them, the second phase of the eruption had begun. A series of fast-moving pyroclastic surges of scalding moist ash swept the area during the night and early morning, overwhelming the fleeing people. The wet material encased their bodies as and where they fell and preserved in stark detail facial features, grim expressions and even the folds of their clothing. Eventually, the bodies of these Pompeians decomposed, leaving an empty cavity in the now-hardened ash.

In 1860 Giuseppe Fiorelli, an archaeologist at Pompeii, was the first to pour plaster into these cavities. The results were startling. Once the plaster had set and the surrounding ash was chipped away, Fiorelli discovered the haunting images of human beings and animals at their very moment of death.

Cast of a young woman
Plaster
Pompeii
This young woman died of suffocation from fumes and falling ash. Her legs are bare, and the imprints of her clothes are preserved on the upper part of her back, hips and stomach and on her left arm. She may have vainly tried to keep her nose and mouth clear by pulling her tunic up over her face. She was found on the Via Stabiae, possibly trying to make her way to the harbor and escape by boat.

Cast of a man
Plaster
Pompeii
Found in a gymnasium, this man was sitting with his back to a wall and his knees drawn up.

Cast of a man and a woman
Plaster
Pompeii
This couple was found in a home, the man reaching out to the woman, as if to comfort her.

Cast of a watchdog
Plaster
Pompeii, House of Vesonius Primus
This unfortunate dog, wearing his bronze-studded collar, was left chained up, and suffocated beneath the ash and cinders. His master, Vesonius Primus, was a successful fuller.